YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN SAN FRANCISCO:

2014 REPORT ON INCIDENCE AND NEEDS

LARKIN STREET

YOUTH SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that 353,000-503,000 youth ages 12-24 are homeless on any given day in the United States (Burt, 2007). Homeless youth are without a place to call home- they sleep at night in parks, their cars, abandoned buildings. Places most would not consider suitable for human residence. Or they find ways to get off the street temporarily, putting themselves at great risk by spending the night with strangers who offer them a place to stay, often in exchange for sex. They lack the educational attainment and employment experience that result in living wage jobs. And they are off track to reach a future that includes self-sufficiency, economic stability, and overall well-being.

Larkin Street is the leading provider of housing and support services to homeless youth in San Francisco. Between July 2013 and June 2014 Larkin Street provided services to over 3,000 youth.[1] Due to the number of youth who access Larkin Street programs we are able to provide a picture of youth homelessness in San Francisco.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

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Paths into Homelessness

Although the group is diverse there are common paths to homelessness. The majority of homeless youth have either run away from unstable home environments, have been involved with youth systems of care (foster care, juvenile justice, and mental health), or have a history of residential instability.Larkin Street serves youth from across the United States and beyond representing 46 states/territories and 41 foreign countries. Eighty-eight percent of youth are from the United States. Among youth from outside the United States, 60% are from Latin American countries. The majority of Larkin Street youth are from local communities. Over 60% of the youth served are from California and almost ¾ of these youth are from the Bay Area, which includes the cities of Oakland and San Jose.

Family Instability

For many youth, instability in their homes forces them out onto the streets before they are adults. Almost 40% of youth surveyed in San Francisco said that a fight or conflict with a parent or guardian contributed to their becoming homeless (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). Common family experiences for these youth include child abuse and/or neglect, domestic violence, and parental substance use. Ninety percent of minor youth accessing shelters through the federally funded Basic Center programs state that they experience difficulty at home such as constant fighting or screaming (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). When asked why they became homeless for the first time over ½ of youth contacted through street outreach said it was because they were asked to leave by a parent of caregiver (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2014). A large majority of these same youth, 70%, said that they did not have the option to return home (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2014).

Systems Involvement

For some youth family instability leads to involvement with the child welfare system. There is a disproportionate representation of foster youth among the homeless youth population. Twenty-five percent of homeless youth surveyed in San Francisco reported previous involvement in the foster care system, which is much higher than the 4% of individuals in the general population with that experience (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). Forty percent of Larkin Street youth spent time in an out-of-home placement, which includes foster care, juvenile detention, and group homes. The majority of these youth, approximately 75%, had been in a foster care placement. Over ⅓ had been in juvenile detention. Youth with five or more placements experience the worst outcomes after leaving the system. Approximately 25% of Larkin Street youth have had five or more placements.

Over ⅔ of youth report they were in placement as adolescents, and of these youth almost half report they emancipated, or aged out, when they turned 18. Youth who emancipate from foster care are less likely than youth in general to graduate from high school or college. They are also more likely to experience serious mental health problems, experience homelessness, and to be involved in the criminal justice system (Children's Defense Fund, 2007).

[1] Unless otherwise noted data source is Larkin Street client database. Data set comprised of youth served and services provided 7/1/13-6/30/14. Intakes are not completed with all youth therefore data subsets may not include total population of youth. Only valid responses included unless exception is noted. Due to rounding, some totals may not equal 100%.

A large number of Larkin Street youth have some degree of previous involvement with the criminal justice system. One third of Larkin Street youth report that they have been arrested. For younger youth many of these arrests are probably due to status offenses, behaviors that are crimes solely due to age, such as running away or underage alcohol consumption. Sixty percent of Larkin Street youth with arrest histories were arrested for the first time as a juvenile. Status offenses were committed by an estimated 45% of juvenile offenders (Steinberg & Haskins, 2008). Many of the other arrests likely stemmed from activities associated with daily survival such as panhandling, loitering, or sleeping outdoors. Youth also turn to participation in the street economy as a way to generate income, this includes sex work or drug dealing, and may also result in arrests. Despite the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which absolves trafficked youth from being legally responsible for crimes committed as a result of their being trafficked, youth are still often placed in the juvenile justice system rather than linked to service providers ("Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000," 2000). Youth involved with the criminal justice system are more likely to report unstable housing (Feldman & Patterson, 2003). In particular, reintegration after exit from detention is difficult. The odds of becoming homeless within a year of release from incarceration, including the juvenile justice system, is 1 in 11 (Sermons & Witte, 2011).

Given the large number of youth who exit either the foster care or criminal justice system and later become homeless more attention must be paid to transition services. Youth leaving foster care and juvenile justice systems are expected to be independent at age 18, yet few have acquired the skills needed to live on their own. California has been in the forefront of addressing this connection between systems involvement and later homelessness. The Transitional Housing Placement Plus Program (THP-Plus) was designed to prevent homelessness among former foster care youth. Since its implementation in 2001 the program has provided housing and support services to over 15,000 youth (THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project, 2014). Extended foster case provides an opportunity for fewer exits into homelessness for youth but only if we have better prepared these youth to leave at 21 than we have been preparing them to leave at age 18. Increased focus and greater resource allocation for improved transition planning from both systems will reduce the number of youth on the streets.

Economic Instability

Many homeless youth report a history of economic and residential instability that may stretch back to when they were still with their family. Forty percent of homeless youth had parents who received public assistance or lived in public housing (Moore, 2006). A family's poor economic situation can lead to family homelessness. Fifteen percent of homeless youth in San Francisco report that their parent or parents were either currently or previously homeless (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). Family homelessness may then lead to a youth being homeless on their own as they turn older or become separated from their families. In fact some family shelters do not take older youth, particularly males, which may result in the youth being on their own and on the streets. In other instances a lack of financial resources lead to an older youth leaving the household to lessen the strain on the rest of the family. A youth may move in and out of homelessness as the effectiveness of their survival strategies in keeping them off the streets declines.

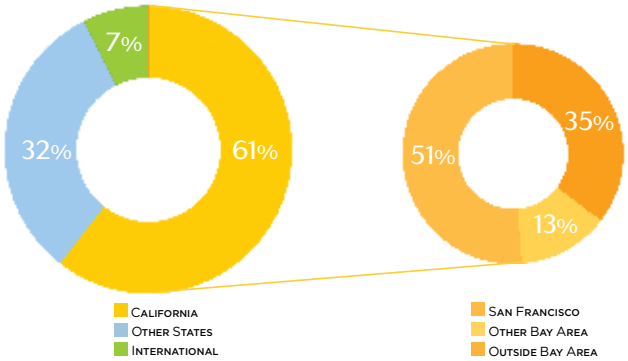
Parenting at a young age can also lead to residential instability. Young homeless mothers, those between the ages of 18 and 25, are more likely to have experienced separation from their own families during childhood, to have been placed in foster care, to experience homelessness at younger ages, and to have more limited support networks (Strengthening At Risk and Homeless Young Mothers and Children, 2012). Teen pregnancy can also result in a youth being thrown out of the home. One third of parenting teens have experienced homelessness, and 40% of them were homeless while pregnant (National Network for Youth Policy Advisory Committee, 2015).

The high level of unemployment and underemployment among youth also results in homelessness. Employment among youth has not rebounded post-recession to the same degree it has among adults. There are 2.7 million fewer jobs currently for youth 16-24 than there would have been if there had not been a recession (O'Sullivan & Johnston, 2012). The unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds is 15%, over twice the national average (O'Sullivan, Mugglestone, & Allison, 2014). And a quarter of these job losses came after the official end of the Great Recession (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). Eighty percent of older youth who enter a federally-funded Transitional Living Program report the inability to maintain housing as a reason for their homelessness, and 35% report insufficient income to sustain housing (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).

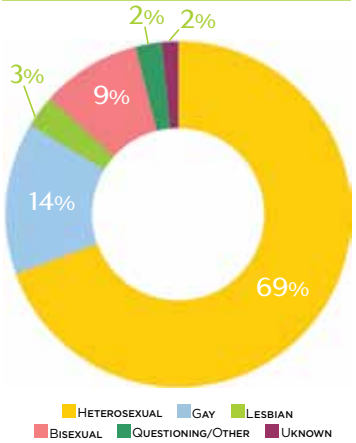
THE STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO

Demographics

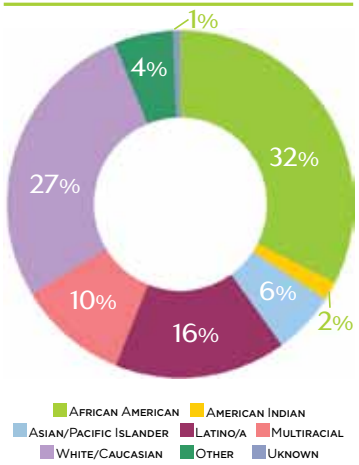
Place of Origin



Sexual Orientation



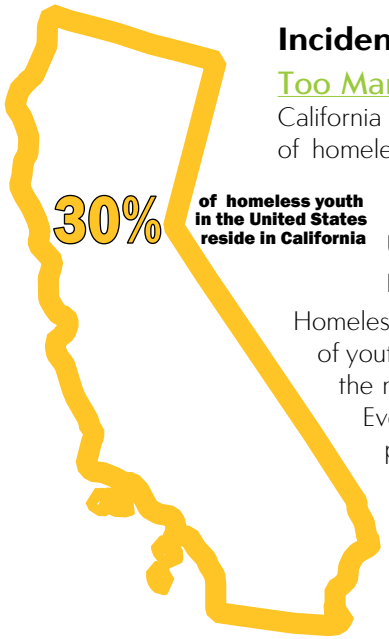
Ethnicity



Larkin Street serves the most vulnerable of the San Francisco homeless population, youth ages 12-24. The majority are youth between the ages of 18 and 24. Programs serve more male (63%) than female youth (32%). Four percent of youth are transgender/intersex/genderqueer/other gender identification. Youth served reflect the diversity of San Francisco with no single ethnic group comprising a majority of youth served.

Larkin Street serves youth from across the United States and beyond representing 40 states/territories and 43 foreign countries. Ninety-three percent of youth are from the United States. Among youth from outside the United States, almost half are from Latin American countries. The majority of Larkin Street youth are from local communities. Approximately six out of every 10 youth served are from California and about half of these youth are from the Bay Area, which includes the cities of Oakland and San Jose.

There is a disproportionate number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth (LGBTQ) among the homeless youth population. Between 320,000 to 400,000 LGBTQ youth experience homelessness at some point each year (Quintana, Rosenthal, & Krehely, 2010). Almost a third of Larkin Street youth report that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. These youth often land on the streets of San Francisco because they fled from the discrimination they encountered in their homes or communities based on their sexual or gender identity.



Incidence and Presenting Issues

Too Many Homeless Youth

California is losing the battle against homelessness on multiple fronts and in multiple ways – including the total number of homeless, percent of homeless who are without shelter, number of homeless children and youth, and number of children and youth who are without shelter. California has the largest number of unaccompanied children and youth in the United States (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). And across the state more than ¾ of those homeless youth were without shelter (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). In addition, San Francisco is one of five major cities that accounted for more than ¼ of the total homeless youth population in the country (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Three of those five cities are in California.

Homeless youth are much more likely to be on the streets and without a place to stay than homeless adults in San Francisco. Eighty-seven percent of youth were unsheltered compared to 55% of the single adult population (Applied Survey Research, 2013a). The percentage is even higher for the most vulnerable of the population, only 7% of unaccompanied children under age 18 were sheltered (Applied Survey Research, 2013a). Every youth deserves a safe place to live. There are far too many children and youth living on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation.

Reasons for Homelessness

Youth become homeless in San Francisco for reasons that are very similar to the adult population. The top three reasons given by youth were job loss; argument with a family member or friend they were staying with who then asked them to leave; and eviction (Applied

Survey Research, 2013a). Despite their younger years homeless youth have experienced a similar number of homelessness episodes as their older counterparts, with approximately 1 in 5 having been homeless more than once in the past 12 months (Applied Survey Research, 2013a). A large number became homeless when they should have been still in the care of a parent with greater than 40% reporting that they were homeless for the first time prior to age 18 (Applied Survey Research, 2013b).

Life on the Streets

Living on the streets has negative impacts on physical health, mental health, and overall well-being. Homeless youth experience exploitation, traumatization, violence, and health issues. All of these impact youth's health and wellness.

Homeless youth are at high risk for a number of health problems due to sleeping outside, lack of food, and irregular sleep. In addition, the lack of access to care can result in small problems developing into more serious issues. Seventeen percent of Larkin Street youth report their health to be fair or poor at intake. Thirty-eight percent do not have health insurance.

Children and youth who are homeless and on the streets are at high risk of exploitation and victimization. Greater than 1 in 4 homeless youth in San Francisco report having been physically attacked or assaulted (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). A national sample of homeless youth found that victimization while on the streets was common - 41% had been robbed, 32% had been beaten up, 18% had been assaulted with a weapon, and 15% had been sexually assaulted or raped (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2014). And over 60% had experienced at least one instance of victimization (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2014). In addition, 1 in 20 homeless youth report they have traded sex for a place to sleep, and one in ten report they've been the victim of sexual exploitation (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). One in three youth are approached by an exploiter or recruited by a pimp within the first 48 hours of being on the street (Murphy, 2013). And youth are also at risk from predators who recruit youth online through various websites and social media sites.

Homeless youth have led unstable and often chaotic lives, often beginning in their homes of origin and continuing to the stressful experience of living on the streets. Over ⅔ of homeless youth reported that they experienced a major trauma at some point in their life such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and witnessing or being a victim of violence (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2014). As a result many are dealing with trauma, depression, anxiety, or another mental health issue. Life on the street is itself a traumatizing experience and some turn to substances to help them cope. Among homeless youth in San Francisco who indicated they used drugs, 41% said it was to self-medicate and 33% to reduce anxiety (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). Larkin Street youth report a high degree of substance use at intake. Only 15% of youth report no substance use, current or previous, and more than ¾ indicate that they used illegal substances at some point. Most commonly used substances at intake are alcohol (60%) and marijuana (53%).

Services Needed

Outreach

Inclusion of youth in HUD's annual Point-in-Time (PIT) has shown that homeless youth are living on the streets to a greater extent than homeless adults (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Outreach is one of the main ways that service providers make initial contact with homeless youth, making them aware of services available and assisting them in starting their path off the streets. Outreach efforts can be either street-based or community-based, making contact with youth on the streets, at events, and in other community settings. Outreach Workers provide basic necessities, like water and socks, as well as brief counseling and referrals to services. Homeless youth on the street often locate themselves away from the homeless adult population, which means that a targeted outreach approach must be taken in order to reach youth and bring them into services and off the streets. Last year Larkin Street outreach workers had over 4,000 contacts with youth throughout San Francisco.

Drop-in Services

Drop-in centers meet basic needs by providing a safe space, meals, clothing, showers, and laundry. In addition youth receive counseling, case management, and referral services. There is a focus on relationship building and assisting youth in accessing additional services. This is important given the trauma histories of most of these youth and the impact this has on their ability to form trusting relationships. Drop-in centers provide a range of activities that youth are able to participate in including wellness, substance use, art, life skills, and peer support groups. Last year, on average, Larkin Street's two drop-in centers served approximately 70 youth every day.

Emergency Housing

Although emergency shelter is not a long-term solution to youth homelessness it is often the first step for youth in their path to stability and meets their most immediate needs. Homeless youth surveyed in San Francisco identified their greatest service wants as food - 61%, clothing - 48%, and shelter/housing - 44% (Applied Survey Research, 2013b).

For younger youth, those under the age of 18, focus is on providing youth with immediate care and support while working closely with parents, guardians, and Child Protective Services to determine the most appropriate long-term housing solution. Providing developmentally appropriate assessment and case management services while they are in a safe place also allows for more successful service referrals and housing placements. In 2014, youth served through the federally funded Basic Center Program, which provides emergency shelter and crisis intervention services for homeless minors, 94% exited to a safe and appropriate placement (National Network for Youth Policy Advisory Committee, 2015).

For older youth the goal is to provide youth appropriate emergency housing for transition age youth.[2] Older youth often do not feel safe in adult shelters and therefore avoid entering. In addition, there are also long wait lists for adult shelters which create additional barriers to entry for youth. For this reason it is important to have youth-specific emergency shelters where youth can feel safe and which provide developmentally appropriate services. Short term housing provides for basic needs while simultaneously working to get youth on a path toward longer term stability. Staff provide counseling, group services, recreational activities, and linkages to other support services.

HELPING YOUTH MOVE OFF THE STREETS

Youth Appropriate Housing Models

Unlike homeless adults, who generally possess the core skill set needed to maintain housing despite the crisis that led to their homelessness, homeless youth have not developed the skills necessary to live independently and maintain a self-supporting income. A youth appropriate model pairs housing with support services to address the issues that are barriers to stability and build the skills and knowledge needed for long-term self-sufficiency. Support services include case management, counseling, independent living skills, educational support, and employment services.

Service Rich Housing

Case management is an integral component of a model of care for homeless youth. It plays a crucial role in assisting youth in their move toward independence and self-sufficiency. The development of a trusting relationship is at the core and is necessary for case management to be effective. The more a Case Manager understands the youth, the greater the support provided to the youth, and the greater the potential for positive and lasting change to occur. (Center for Health Training, 2003). Case Management assists youth to identify their aspirations in life and chart a path towards making those aspirations a reality. Youth work collaboratively with Case Managers to develop tangible short- and long-term goals related to education, employment, financial stability, and well-being and create individualized case plans to achieve these goals. Case Managers also help youth to navigate community resources to access the services and supports they need in order to reach their goals.

[2] There is no federal funding stream dedicated to emergency housing for youth ages 18-24, therefore it is not consistently available across communities.

Counseling services are provided to assist youth in reaching a state of overall wellness in their lives. A trauma informed model of care is essential when working with homeless youth. This approach recognizes the impact that trauma has had in a youth's life, and seeks to ensure that they are not traumatized while in the program. Larkin Street utilizes a harm reduction approach that helps youth to identify and minimize the negative impact activities, such as substance use, has on their lives, both in the short and long-term. Counselors help youth to develop the tools they need to address barriers to their well-being and youth are empowered to be the agents of change in their lives.

Stability through Longer Stays

Housing provides the stability needed for youth to be able to address the issues impacting their potential for long-term self-sufficiency. Larkin Street provides a range of housing options to meet the needs of a diverse group of youth who come to the agency with varied needs based on factors such as age, health status, behavioral health issues, and level of self-sufficiency. There is a focus on building the skills youth need to live independently such as menu planning, cooking, household maintenance, household budgeting, and money management. The most appropriate housing model for the majority of homeless youth is transitional housing. The longer length of stay allows youth to make progress toward their long-term goals and reach significant milestones such as completion of a GED or attainment of career track employment. Permanent supportive housing is an alternative for youth who are in need of longer-term supports due primarily to physical health issues, behavioral health issues, or disability. Seventy-seven percent of youth who completed Larkin Street comprehensive transitional housing services last year moved into stable housing.

Building Self-Sufficiency

Homeless youth have had little opportunity to develop the academic credentials, job skills, and work supports needed to avoid a life of poverty. By the time they reach our doors, most youth have become disengaged from educational institutions. Twenty-two percent of Larkin Street youth are not currently or recently enrolled in school or an educational program at intake. In addition, 20% of Larkin Street youth do not have a high school diploma or equivalency. Although only 20% of homeless youth surveyed in San Francisco were currently engaged in educational activities, 72% stated that they wanted to further their education (Applied Survey Research, 2013b). Only 14% of Larkin Street youth are employed full time at intake. The majority of employed youth, 71%, are working part-time with pay that is inadequate for housing and that offers few or no benefits. The average monthly income for youth at intake is $770. San Francisco is an incredibly expensive housing market, the average monthly rent is $3,488 for a one-bedroom apartment. In order to achieve long-term self-sufficiency homeless youth need to get on a path toward sustainable employment, this is achieved through bolstering of their education.

Educational Supports

Most homeless youth are disconnected from educational systems and have been off-track educationally for an extended period of time. This includes long periods without school attendance or enrollment. This is seen in the disproportionately low rates of high school graduation among homeless students. Youth who did not complete high school described the presence of multiple, prevalent stressors in their lives over an extended period of time that resulted in their leaving school including violence; housing instability or homelessness; personal responsibility to earn money for basic needs; and becoming a caregiver to a parent or sibling (America's Promise Alliance, 2014). Becoming homeless means that you are 87% more likely to stop attending school (America's Promise Alliance, 2014).

Lack of high school completion is linked to unemployment and diminished earnings among those who are employed. Someone who has not completed high school is four times more likely to be unemployed than a college graduate (American Human Development Project, 2009). Those without a high school diploma who do manage to secure a job should expect to earn significantly less than those with a diploma. High school completion translates to approximately a 40% increase in annual earnings (American Human Development Project, 2009).

But a high school diploma is not enough in today's market. Individuals with a high school diploma still have few viable employment opportunities, limited potential for advancement, and reduced potential for future earnings. Most of the workforce growth in the past 30 years has been in fields that require at least a college degree (Rouse & Barrow,

2006). A college graduate can expect to earn 2.4 times as much in a year as someone without a high school degree (American Human Development Project, 2009). And by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require post-secondary credentials (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Post-secondary credentials are the key to long-term economic stability.

Reconnecting homeless youth to education is the first step. For school age youth the focus should be on providing ongoing academic support to reengage youth in education. Federal law gives homeless youth the ability to enroll in school right away, even if they don't have the documentation usually required for enrollment (National Network for Youth Policy Advisory Committee, 2015). Academic support services such as mentoring, tutoring, and study groups are integral to maintaining school engagement and moving youth toward high school completion.

For older youth who did not complete high school, adult education services aimed at completion of a GED are an essential building block. GED services should include intensive one-on-one tutoring and remediation. Initial assessment is crucial to assess skills gaps. Services are then tailored to develop skills in those areas. Test preparation services should include practice tests which build confidence and prepares youth for the actual testing experience.

The next step is enrollment in post-secondary education. Preparing youth for college is more than just academic preparation. Therefore it is necessary to include programming that supports youth in the transition to post-secondary education by providing them with the academic and practical knowledge they need to succeed. This includes information regarding selecting an academic institution, college tours, financial aid, course selection, and class registration.

Post-secondary programming for homeless youth should include career exploration to determine the educational requirements for various occupations so that youth may choose the most appropriate course of study based on their long-term aspirations. College counseling services include assistance with the financial aid process, guidance on course selection, and mentoring. Finally services must extend beyond enrolment. Ongoing counseling, academic support, financial support, and social support are important for persistence and completion of credentials.

Although the overwhelming majority of homeless youth would like to continue their educational pursuits they don't have the means. They are financially unstable and unable to meet their basic needs such as housing, food, clothing, and utilities. Providing youth with housing support gives them the stability necessary to be able to shift their focus from meeting their immediate needs to planning for the future and developing long-term goals such as degree attainment.

Career Readiness

The degree of youth disconnection from the workforce is at unprecedented levels. There are 2.7 million fewer jobs currently for youth 16-24 than there would have been if there had not been a recession (O'Sullivan & Johnston, 2012). Just over half of young adults ages 18-24 are currently employed, the lowest it has been since the government began collecting data in 1948 (Taylor et al., 2012). Early bouts with unemployment often results in young adults earning lower wages for many years following their unemployment due to lost skills development, training, and work experience. Over the next 10 years the collective impact of youth who have experienced just six months of unemployment will be more than $21.4 billion in lost wages (Ayres, 2013).

At a minimum workforce development services for homeless youth should include job readiness services, workforce placement, and career development services. For youth with minimal experience in the workforce, development of basic job skills is important. Entry level programming must provide basic services such as assistance with attainment of work documents and development of basic employment skills. Workforce readiness skills are for youth who have developed the basics and are ready to start preparing to enter the workforce. Services at this level should include résumé preparation assistance, tools for finding employment, development of interview skills, job placement, and continued development of employment skills and professional conduct. Employment training provides the next level of skills development for youth and can include a range of opportunities such as advanced technical training, supported employment, and internship opportunities. To assist youth in developing a professional path, career exploration and subsidized internship opportunities are integral. Job placement and retention services help youth find employment opportunities that provide a livable wage and move youth towards independence. Job retention services are needed to provide support for youth once they have obtained employment.

POLICY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Develop an Accurate Picture of Youth Homelessness

Every two years, as part of the HUD mandated Point-In-Time (PIT) count for jurisdictions receiving federal funding for homelessness programs, communities conduct a count of the homeless persons living among them. Youth that can be included in HUD's Point-in-Time (PIT) count differ from youth who are eligible for HUD homelessness assistance programs (National Network for Youth Policy Advisory Committee, 2015). This is a problem since the PIT count is the basis for determining the resources needed in the community to address homelessness across subpopulations. If a group is not included in the PIT Count it conveys that the population is not a priority and/or that the population is not eligible for HUD services (National Network for Youth Policy Advisory Committee, 2015). It is a commonly accepted fact that the PIT Count provides for an underestimate of the homeless youth population. Inclusion of homeless youth who are not living on the streets or in shelters would provide a more accurate estimate of the population.

In 2008 Congress authorized a national study of the prevalence, incidence, and needs of homeless youth to be conducted every five years to address the lack of national level data available. This study has never been conducted because funds have not been appropriated. Congress should appropriate $3 million dollars to conduct this long overdue study so that the level of need is determined and resources can be most effectively targeted.

End Criminalization and the Negative Impacts

Individuals who are without a place to live must conduct daily living activities outside, such as eating and sleeping. Increasingly these activities are being criminalized by communities across the country. In the last decade the United States has seen an increase in so-called quality of life laws, which prohibit activities such as loitering, food distribution, and sitting or sleeping in cars and public places - including, parks, plazas, and sidewalks. A recent study that analyzed municipal codes across the state found that cities in California have more anti-homeless laws than other U.S. cities (The Policy Advocacy Clinic, 2015). All of the cities in the study have enacted at least one law restricting daytime activities such as standing, sitting, or resting in public places (The Policy Advocacy Clinic, 2015). All but one of the cities ban at least one nighttime activity such as sleeping, camping, and lodging in vehicles (The Policy Advocacy Clinic, 2015). The effects of these criminalizing laws is that it creates barriers for individuals trying to stabilize their lives.

Homeless youth who are on the streets because they are unable to afford housing are also unable to pay tickets received for quality of life offenses. These tickets then become warrants, which can result in arrest and incarceration. In the worst case scenario a homeless youth receives a citation for a quality of life offense, they get arrested on a warrant because they were unable to pay the fine, which then results in serving time in jail and/or prison. Both unpaid tickets and a criminal record can hinder someone's ability to obtain housing or become employed. Criminal convictions, even for minor non-violent offenses can create long-lasting barriers to social integration and economic security (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2013).

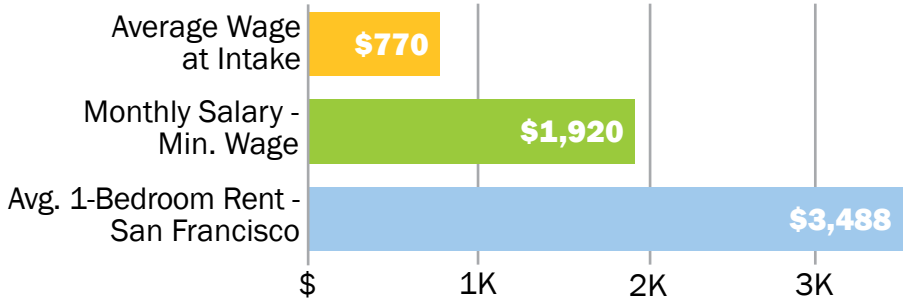
Quality of life laws are not sound policy. They do not decrease the activities they seek to reduce. They are not cost effective, particularly when compared to early intervention services that would actually assist individuals in moving off the streets. A survey of major U.S. cities, conducted as part of the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, found jurisdictions spend an average of $87 per day to incarcerate an individual in a county jail, but only $28 per day for shelter (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2014). Most importantly, these laws do nothing to address the root causes of homelessness. Rather than criminalizing the behaviors associated with living on the streets, we need to increase the availability of housing and services in our communities. One of the ways to accomplish this is through the passage of homeless bill of rights legislation which diverts investment from criminalization and towards stabilization efforts.

Increase Available Housing

Invest in Youth Appropriate Housing Programs

We must increase the number of youth appropriate housing program beds that are available across the country through investment in a continuum of housing options available for transition age youth. This is accomplished by expanding emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing. Shelters have drawn criticism because they are over utilized by individuals and families who have multiple stays of extended duration. Emergency shelter is an important first step off the street for homeless youth and provides for initial stabilization. However a lack of housing options often results in a cycle of homelessness and shelter stays as youth try to get a foothold. One way to decease the overreliance on shelters is to increase the availability of transitional housing. Transitional housing programs are appropriate for youth as it provides for longer stays in housing coupled with support services to address issues that are barriers to independence and self-sufficiency.

The HUD PIT count identified over 45,000 unaccompanied homeless children and youth on one night (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Yet there are less than 4,200 housing program beds nationally dedicated to this population, meeting less than 10% of the need on that night alone (National Network for Youth, 2015c). The programs funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act routinely turn young people away from their housing programs due to lack of capacity. In Fiscal Year 2014 there were 2,425 youth turned away from emergency housing for minors (Basic Center Program) and 4,842 youth turned away from transitional housing (Transitional Living Program) (National Network for Youth, 2015a). And these numbers underestimate the gaps between need and availability since the Basic Center Program only provide crisis housing for minor youth, and the Transitional Living Program only serves youth up to the age of 22. In addition, the RHYA funded programs are limited in reach, many communities are without one or both programs. We must increase the funding available for RHYA programs and ensure that HUD funds are more proportionately distributed to youth focused programs.



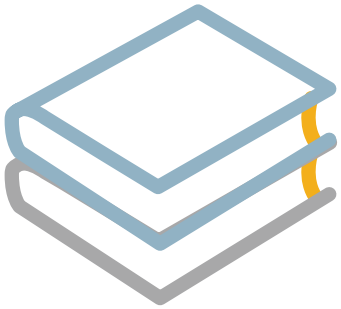
Create More Affordable Housing

Homelessness is caused at the most basic level by the inability of individuals to afford a place to live. Twenty-three percent of homeless individuals surveyed in San Francisco stated that lack of available housing was an obstacle to obtaining permanent housing, a 15% jump from the previous year (Applied Survey Research, 2013a). In addition, 55% reported not being able to afford rent as an obstacle (Applied Survey Research, 2013a). Any strategy to address youth homelessness must address the dearth of affordable housing across the country. The gap between wages earned and fair market rents continue to grow as salaries don't keep pace with increasing housing costs. If we don't provide an ample supply of affordable housing in our communities we will only see a temporary shift in homelessness from the streets into shelters and short term housing solutions rather than an elimination of homelessness.

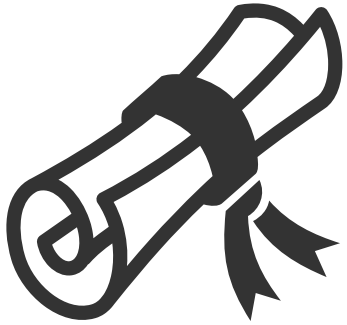
The National Housing Trust Fund was established in 2008 to provide an ongoing, dedicated, and sufficient source of revenue for low-income housing. The majority of the funds were designated for rental housing to significantly increase the affordable housing stock in America and positively impact the homelessness rate. At the end of 2014, after a long wait and for the first time, the Trust secured a funding source when Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were obligated to contribute. However the funds are once again jeopardy. The proposed FY16 appropriations bill passed by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) would take all of the funding for the National Housing Trust Fund and use it for other HUD programs while also forbidding Congress to put any other funding into the Trust. We have a housing crisis in the United States and we must address the shortage of affordable housing across the nation if we are to effectively address the issue of youth homelessness.

Increase Educational Opportunities

Given the growth in the number of positions that require post-secondary credentials, we must do a better job of moving youth toward that goal. Approximately one out of every five youth who start high school do not complete high school on time, if they complete high school at all (America's Promise Alliance, 2014). We must do a better job in reducing the barriers to high school completion, either a diploma or a credential for youth who became disconnected prior to graduation. In addition, there must be better preparation of high school students for post-secondary education as well as support in the transition to higher education. Finally, there must be increased support for youth once they enter college. Forty percent of all undergraduates and 60% of community college students are required to enroll in developmental (remedial) education courses (Corrin et al., 2014). This demonstrates that students are not well prepared for post-secondary education. There are too many youth who are leaving high school prior to graduation and too few youth completing post-secondary credentials.



A multiple pathways approach incorporates preparation for post-secondary academics as well as for careers. A focus on college and career "readiness" means that youth will develop in high school the skills and knowledge they need to make informed decisions about career and post-secondary education options, as well as being able to successfully navigate both worlds after leaving high school (Visher, Altuna, & Safran, 2013). This is one promising strategy to move youth through high school to diploma, ensuring they are ready for either work or further education.



Some schools have implemented strategies to support more students in their pursuit of a high school diploma including increased teacher supports, development of learning communities, early identification of off-track students, and intensive support for students who are in the most need (Corrin et al., 2014). For students who are homeless an Integrated Student Support (ISS) program could be particularly effective as it takes a holistic approach to learning, and focuses on reducing both academic and nonacademic barriers to high school completion (Anderson Moore & Emig, 2014).

We have seen a shift toward a "college for all" mindset in the United States, a belief that college should be widely available and accessible to all, and a degree attainable by all. Now more than 70% of Americans enroll in a four year college, and low income students account for a large part of this increase in enrollment (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). One result of this is that the student profile of today looks very different than the one of yesteryear. Many are financially independent and almost a quarter have dependent children (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2010). The high cost of college means that most youth are working college students. And a large part of this cost is room and board. The average cost for an in-state student at a public four-year college is approximately $19,000; room and board accounts for half of that cost (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). And at a public two-year institution, on average, room and board accounts for ⅔ of costs (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). In 2011 more than ⅔ of undergraduates worked while attending college, and ⅕ worked full-time (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). Number one reason students said they didn't complete college – they are unable to balance work and school (Johnson et al., 2010). When asked what would help students with similar post-high school circumstances to yours in getting a college degree 8 in 10 students who did not graduate said allowing part-time students to qualify for financial aid (Johnson et al., 2010).

Housing instability is a reality of many of these students. At least 58,000 college students are homeless, in what is almost certainly an underestimate (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). The financial barriers to post-secondary education that homeless students encounter are concrete and easy to identify. In addition there are obstacles that are non-academic and non-financial in nature. These more intangible barriers include lack of knowledge on how to navigate the collegiate system; how to manage your time effectively to complete classwork; or lack of confidence in your abilities to succeed in a college environment. Innovative programs at postsecondary institutions aimed to keep homeless youth in school include financial support, case management, housing assistance, basic needs support, academic and career support, and behavioral health support (National Center for Homeless Education, 2009). Financial support is provided both through assistance in accessing financial aid; development of financial literacy; and direct assistance for housing, food, and transportation (National Center for Homeless Education, 2009). Case management support for students include holistic assessment and supports that are both academic and non-academic in nature (National Center for Homeless Education, 2009). Housing assistance can take many forms including reduced costs for on campus housing, assistance with payment of housing costs to mediate the time between payment and financial aid disbursement, and assistance gaining off campus housing (through housing providers or financial support for private landlords)(National Center for Homeless Education, 2009). In addition, provision of housing during academic breaks is crucial to homeless students who have nowhere else to go except the streets.

THE LEARNING CENTERS

A new addition to the Larkin Street continuum of programs are the Learning Centers. The goal of the Learning Centers is to advance college and career readiness of youth through an intensive six-month program. The Centers take a holistic approach that blends experiential learning, academic preparation, mindfulness, and career development with a focus on a specific industry. The program uses blended learning, an innovative approach that utilizes technology to provide individualized instruction that allows youth to work at their own pace. There are currently two Learning Centers in operation, one focused on Technology and another on Hospitality. A third Learning Center focused on HIV Prevention and Health Care is in development. Key to the success of the program are our community partnerships.

Learning Center partners:

- **Sylvan Learning** to provide academic instruction
- **Outward Bound** to provide outdoor leadership education
- **UCSF/Osher School of Integrative Medicine** to deliver its Mindfulness or Urban Teens program

Career Pathways

Transition age youth were hard hit by the recession which decreased employment opportunities, and have not rebounded to the same extent as other groups. There must be greater investments in developing a workforce that is prepared to meet the needs of the current labor market. One study found that workers who participated in sector-focused training programs increased their earnings by 29% (Maguire, Freely, Clymer, Conway, & Schwartz, 2010). And funds must be provided to assist those who are the most disconnected and may need more intensive services, for those youth represent the greatest potential for return on investment. When homeless youth in San Francisco were asked what they needed in order to stabilize their lives more than a ⅓ said they needed job training or employment (Applied Survey Research, 2013a).

Barriers for homeless youth in accessing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs must be eliminated. Communities across the country have stringent locally mandated entry requirements which prevent homeless youth from enrolling in these programs. Strategies to address these barriers include guidance to local workforce/labor boards to prioritize homeless youth in their programs and to adjust eligibility requirements to increase participation of homeless youth (National Network for Youth, 2015b).

Summary

If we are to meet the goal of eliminating youth homelessness by 2020, as set forth in the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, we must devise a comprehensive youth strategy with clear goals and allocate sufficient resources for implementation (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012). This strategy must include youth appropriate housing that includes support services; an increase in the affordable housing stock; educational services; and workforce development. Investing in homeless youth is an investment in our future.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the needs of homeless youth requires a multipronged approach that interrupts their current trajectory, provides stabilization, encourages well-being, and creates opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills needed for independent adulthood. Safety and stability, provided through housing, is first and foremost. It is also important to address the impacts of trauma in these youths' lives, empowering them to move forward from a place of strength and resilience. And finally, we must prepare them to compete in today's workforce, which requires higher levels of education and training. This continuum of services moves youth along the path from youth homelessness to self-reliant adulthood.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which funds outreach, family reunification, crisis intervention, counseling, crisis housing, and transitional housing.
- Appropriate at least $2 million dollars for a national study of the prevalence, incidence, and needs of homeless youth to be conducted every five years to address the lack of national level data currently available.
- Pass the Homeless Children and Youth Act to amend HUD's definition of homelessness to include children and youth who are verified as homeless by other federal programs, and to restore decision-making to local communities.
- Ensure there is a dedicated funding source for the National Housing Trust Fund which was established in 2008 to provide an ongoing, dedicated, and sufficient source of revenue for low-income housing.

State

- Pass the Access to Education for Homeless Youth bill which would eliminate high school equivalency exam fees for homeless youth.
- Pass the Homeless Youth - Housing Priority in Higher Education bill that would require that California State University and the University of California give prioritized access for on-campus housing to students experiencing homelessness and ensures that on-campus housing remain available to these students over breaks.
- Pass the Building Homes and Jobs Act, which would establish a permanent funding source for affordable housing across the state.
- Pass homeless bill of rights legislation, such as California's Right to Rest Act, to decriminalize daily living activities such as standing, sitting, resting, sleeping, and sharing of food in public places.

Local

- Continue the development pipeline of housing for transitional age youth to reach the goal of adding 400 units for this vulnerable population as outlined in the 2007 San Francisco TAY Housing Plan.

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Since 1984, Larkin Street Youth Services has been committed to helping San Francisco's most vulnerable youth ages 12-24 move beyond street life. This commitment has fueled the development of a comprehensive continuum of services thatt is nationally recognized as a model of innovative and effective care. We offer stability, safety and the opportunity for a better life.

Research and Evaluation
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